

In The News and Elsewhere

Global Fund Articles

Against a foe as formidable as HIV, anything less than victory is creating a future problem

With another World AIDS Day behind us, we reflect on the nearly 40 million people who have lost their lives to this terrible disease. Yet we should also recognize the extraordinary progress we have made in combatting HIV and AIDS. Since 2002, in countries where the Global Fund invests, AIDS-related deaths are down by 72% and new HIV infections are down 61%.

By reducing the annual cost of HIV treatment from \$10,000 in 2002 to just under \$45 today, we've been able to massively expand HIV treatment, prevention and care. Now 24.5 million people are on HIV treatment in the countries in which the Global Fund invests, and we have reversed the course of the pandemic.

Yet the fight against HIV remains unfinished. In 2022, there were 630,000 deaths due to AIDS and 1.3 million new HIV infections. AIDS is still the biggest killer of women aged 18 to 45 in Africa. There are some 9 million people worldwide who are HIV-positive, but not on treatment. Without treatment, half of all children born with HIV will die by the age of two.

[Link to [Forbes article by Peter Sands](#)]

Global Fund: 40% of country funding requests are now climate-related

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria announced that 70% of its funding will be spent in 50 of the most climate-vulnerable countries globally over the next three years. Part of the funding will go towards helping countries develop more resilient health systems through activities like digitizing health records so they don't get lost during floods and reducing their health risks to climate change.

Peter Sands, executive director of the fund, told Devex that there's been an increase in countries asking for more support in these areas. "We are seeing what countries want from us is changing in response to climate change. I think about 40% of what we call funding requests, which are essentially a country's expression of what it wants to spend its country allocation on, about 40% of them have explicit considerations of climate change-related needs," Sands said. "We work on a three-year cycle. If I'd gone back three years, I reckon that percentage would have been a single-digit percentage. So there's been a massive uptick," he added. A big focus of the fund's climate change-related work is malaria, which is highly climate-sensitive. Sands said they're heavily focused on expanding seasonal malaria chemoprevention giving children antimalarial medicines in monthly intervals during a season when malaria is known to spike which he said is very cost-effective in protecting children up to five years old from severe malaria.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

Civil society condemns suppression of voices at global forum on Aids and STIs in Zimbabwe

Representatives of various civil society organisations have expressed outrage over the suppression of their voices and the cancellation of the People's March at the International Conference on Aids and STIs in Africa (Icasa) 2023, which was to be hosted in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 5 December. The People's March was organised to focus attention and demand action on critical health issues including HIV, Aids, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

However, the march was abruptly cancelled “with no notice or justification”. The ban was accompanied by disturbing reports of activists being detained, community stalls being dismantled and intimidation by police at the conference. A statement addressed to the Icasa secretariat and the Zimbabwean government was signed by civil society organisations including Health GAP, Treatment Action Campaign, GFAN Africa, Avac, Positive-Generation, Swaziland Network of Young Positives, Sexual Minorities Uganda, AfNHi, Stop TB Partnership-Kenya, The People’s Matrix Association Lesotho and Waci Health.

[Link to [Daily Maverick article](#) and attached]

\$9bn boost for nations worst-hit by climate change

More than 70 per cent of the Global Fund’s funding, equivalent to more than \$9bn, will be spent over the next three years on countries that have been the most impacted by climate change. This is according to a statement released by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria on Tuesday morning. The main aim of the funding will be to support health programmes in these affected countries. “The fight against deadly infectious diseases must go hand in hand with addressing climate change,” said Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund. “The climate crisis is having a severe impact on low- and middle-income countries that suffer from high disease burdens and weak health systems, putting communities who have contributed the least to global carbon emissions at great risk.”

[Link to [Gulf Business article](#)]

Fight the increase in new HIV infections with the 72 hour post exposure HIV prevention pill

South Africa has made remarkable progress towards achieving the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets for HIV/Aids, according to a 2022 survey. These targets aim to ensure that by 2025, 95% of all people living with HIV are aware of their status, 95% of those aware are on antiretroviral treatment (ART) and 95% of those on ART achieve viral load suppression. The survey revealed that among people aged 15 years and older living with HIV in South Africa, 90% were aware of their status, 91% of those aware were on ART and 94% of those on ART were virally suppressed. However, the survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), also shed light on the remaining gaps in addressing the HIV epidemic in South Africa.

[Link to [IOL South Africa article](#)]

HIV/AIDS Articles

How to protect women in the country most affected by AIDS: ‘I’m sick of begging my boyfriend to use condoms’

South Africa HIV’s Ground Zero pilots the ring method, which can reduce the risk of infection by up to 50%. In the face of this stigma, those in charge of prevention like Mkhize are “excited” about a pilot program for the use of the dapivirine vaginal ring (DVR), the world’s first topical HIV prevention method, recommended in January 2021 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an additional preventative option for women at substantial risk of infection. South Africa has just received 16,000 vaginal rings, with support from The Global Fund. The reach of this prevention method may be made to extend further: on November 30, the nonprofit Population Council announced that a factory in South Africa will start producing rings that are cheaper and thereby accessible to a greater number of people.

[Link to [El Pais article](#)]

Russia faces shortage of HIV/AIDS drugs

More than one million people in Russia are HIV positive, but many don't receive the necessary treatment. As infection rates soar, supplies of HIV/AIDS medications are dwindling. Why is that?

[Link to [Deutsche Welle article](#)]

Rethinking HIV in an aging society

Since the first cases of AIDS were identified in 1981, much about the epidemic and society's response to it has aged. Although the global infection rate continues to decline, more people are being diagnosed with HIV as older adults, and those successfully treated with antiretrovirals are living well into their later years.

As AIDS enters what will hopefully be its final chapter, it is fitting to ask: what will the pandemic's later life look like, and how can we better respond to the needs of aging individuals and societies?

[Link to [Think Global Health article](#)]

Global Health and Pandemic Preparedness

COP28: 124 countries commit to milestone 'Declaration on Climate and Health'

In what is being described as a historic and pivotal moment by top COP28 and World Health Organization (WHO) officials, 124 countries have endorsed the Declaration of Climate and Health. Dr Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, President of COP28 in Dubai, made the announcement. "We have received commitments from 123 countries that are ready to sign the health declaration," Al Jaber said Saturday. "That is a big achievement. It is a giant leap in the right direction." China committed to the declaration shortly after Al Jaber's remarks, bringing the final tally to 124.

The political declaration marks the first time that the health impacts of climate change have taken centre stage in 28 years of UN climate talks. China and the European Union headline the list of signatories, while the United States, India, and South Africa had not signed at the time of publication. While it is not legally binding, the declaration serves as a voluntary call to action outside the formal process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

'Accessing healthcare is not easy here': medical challenges around the world – in pictures

Since 2005, Brazilian photographer André François has been capturing pandemic, earthquake and other health responses in remote communities across the world

[Link to [The Guardian article](#)]

Stigma, regulatory barriers delay mpox response in country that needs it most

Vaccines and treatments that could help tackle an mpox epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo are lying unused outside the country despite a death rate far higher than from the global outbreak that began last year.

Stigma, regulatory hurdles and competing disease outbreaks are all factors holding back the response, according to almost a dozen scientists, public health officials and drugmakers involved.

Since January, at least 581 people have died of mpox in Congo out of 12,569 suspected cases, compared to 167 deaths among 91,788 reported cases in 116 other countries since January 2022, according to the World Health Organization.

Mpox is a viral infection that spreads through close contact and causes flu-like symptoms and pus-filled skin lesions.

[Link to [Reuters article](#)]

Bumper Week for Pandemic Negotiations

This is a bumper week for pandemic negotiations the last formal set for the year – with meetings of both the World Health Organization’s (WHO) intergovernmental negotiating body (INB) and the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (WGIHR).

The INB, which is negotiating a pandemic agreement, meets until Wednesday, while the WGIHR meets on Thursday and Friday. The proximity of the meetings is intentional, as it enables negotiating teams to attend one another’s meetings to ensure synergy between the two processes. The International Health Regulations (IHR) define the processes leading to the declaration by the WHO Director General of a public health emergency of international concern and member states’ responsibilities. They are the only global internally binding obligations related to health emergencies.

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

Developing Countries Could Use IHR Negotiations as a Tool to Ensure Pandemic Agreement Talks Stay on Course

WHO member states met in Geneva during December 7-8 to make headway in the negotiations to amend the International Health Regulations. Countries met under the aegis of the Working Group to set up to amend these legally binding technical regulations applicable to 196 States Parties and WHO on public health events with risk of international spread.

More than 300 amendments have been submitted by countries to 33 of the 66 articles of the IHR, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the process first began more than two years ago, countries were supposed to have concluded their negotiations on the IHR by December 2023.

[Link to [Geneva Health Files article](#)]

Health Day at COP28: a hard-won (partial) gain

The Lancet has long campaigned for the link between climate change and health to be recognised, and so we welcome the first Health Day at a COP summit, which took place on Dec 3, at COP28 in Dubai. Planned to showcase the links between health and climate change, the day saw US\$1 billion of funding provided for both mitigation and adaptation programmes, with an emphasis on transformation of health systems, addressing the environmental determinants of health, and ensuring communities and vulnerable populations are protected. The day culminated in a new Declaration on Climate and Health, signed by 124 countries, with the express aims of preparing health-care systems to cope with climate change and acknowledging the need for governments to protect people's health.

As highlighted in this year's Countdown report, life-threatening temperatures are becoming more frequent, the transmission of deadly infectious diseases is rising due to increased climatic suitability for vectors, and weather extremities are causing food and shelter insecurity for millions of people. Approximately half of the world's children, a group uniquely affected by the changing climate, live in countries that are rated high-risk for exposure to the impacts of climate change.

The fact that climate change is a health issue has been underappreciated. Advances such as the Declaration are hard-won but, given that current commitments on reducing emissions are not enough to prevent catastrophic outcomes, this is not a time for complacency.

[Link to [Lancet article](#)]

WHO Governing Board approves consensus resolution on Gaza health and humanitarian situation

In a fragile show of unity, the World Health Organization Executive Board approved a draft resolution calling for “immediate, sustained and unimpeded” humanitarian relief to beleaguered Gaza, including safe passage of health personnel and supplies, as well as ambulances and patients.

The WHO EB move, which will clear the resolution for approval by the May World Health Assembly, represents the first-ever consensus statement on the charged conflict so far in a UN body. The draft resolution on “Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory” carefully sidesteps any direct references either to Hamas or Israel in a charged conflict where both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and their allies, have accused each other of genocide and war crimes.

Sunday’s approval of the WHO EB resolution came just two days after another UN Security Council resolution calling for a humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza was vetoed by the United States because it did not condemn the initial Hamas 7 October attack on Israeli communities, which led to the deaths of some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and the taking of more than 240 Israeli hostages.

US deputy ambassador Robert Wood had called Friday’s UN resolution “imbalanced”, saying that a cease fire that left Hamas in power in Gaza would “only plant the seeds for the next war.”

The WHO EB resolution, in contrast, focusses on humanitarian relief, making only one reference in the preamble to the broader UN “appeal for a humanitarian cease-fire.” Along with general calls for the free flow of aid and relief to besieged Palestinians, it also mandates WHO to lay plans for the rebuilding of Gaza’s shattered health system.

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

Vaccine Alliance Gavi Agrees on \$1 Billion Investment in African Vaccine Manufacturing

The Board of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has approved the establishment of a new African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA), a financing instrument that is to make more than \$1 billion available to support sustainable vaccine manufacturing in Africa.

The board decision marks a historic reversal of past efforts which saw the agency’s massive budget for vaccine procurement concentrated on the biggest pharma manufacturers in Asia, Europe and the Americas who could offer the lowest price-per-dose on vaccines Gavi procured due to economies of scale.

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

Lack of progress on adaptation agenda at COP 28 raises concerns

With just a few days left to come to an agreement on a framework to deliver on the Global Goal on Adaptation at COP 28, significant divisions remain.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

Opinion: WHA 77 a landmark for climate and health policymaking?

The climate crisis is here. And health is its human face. Climate change is harming the essential ingredients of good health clean air, safe drinking water, reliable access to nutritious food supply, and safe shelter. These impacts further exacerbate the weaknesses of already overburdened health systems.

Climate change disproportionately affects low- and middle-income countries. Yet, looking at it from a health perspective quickly highlights how the issue goes beyond borders and requires global solutions. According to the World Health Organization, 99% of the world's population breathes unhealthy air, putting us at risk of heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, and pneumonia.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

Opinion: Mobilizing capital through philanthropy to address polycrisis

The world is currently facing multiple, interconnected crises, including the climate emergency, increasing protracted conflicts driving displacement, and pervasive, widening inequalities. They have exposed and exacerbated weaknesses in our social, economic, and environmental systems. Each of these challenges is substantial in isolation, but they are also interconnected. Together, they pose an existential threat to life on our planet and all our futures.

For example, the effects of climate change are impacting us on various fronts in the global battle against hunger. A U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization report published this year states that, over the past three decades, disasters related to climate change have resulted in the loss of \$3.8 trillion worth of crops and livestock production. This accounts for 5% of the annual global agricultural gross domestic product and is equivalent to the daily dietary needs of millions.

Climate-related shocks including rising temperatures, floods, and prolonged droughts cause adverse impacts on agricultural production, which directly and indirectly impact people's food security. For example, in countries where temperatures are already extremely high, such as the Sahel belt of Africa, rising temperatures have a more immediate effect on crops such as wheat that are less heat tolerant, making it clear that the fight against hunger goes hand in hand with the fight against climate change.

According to the 2023 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, it is estimated that between 690 million and 783 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022.

Addressing each challenge in isolation is no longer a viable or effective strategy. We urgently need a new paradigm recognizing their interconnected nature and supporting coordinated responses through deeper, more effective collaboration.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

Devex Newswire: How misinformation is stalling the pandemic treaty

The 28th U.N. Climate Change Conference in Dubai isn't over, but we're already looking ahead to another global confab: the World Health Assembly in May. Don't worry, we still have plenty of COP 28 coverage, including a special wrap-up edition tomorrow, so be on the lookout for that.

But back to WHA. Why does what happens in May matter today? Because it's not just climate change that's an existential threat. Pandemics also stalk humanity. Countries now have less than six months to forge a consensus on how to better respond to future pandemics to avoid the deaths and economic wreckage that marked the last one.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

Devex CheckUp: The big win, and disappointments, for health at COP 28

At COP 28, an acknowledgment of how the climate crisis is also a health crisis, despite no declaration of fossil fuel phaseout. Plus, updates on the African Medicines Agency, and new pledges for health and climate.

[Link to [Devex article](#)]

How the world gets universal health coverage back on track

In a tiny village along the Peruvian Amazon, women line up on a warm, rainy August morning to protect themselves against cervical cancer, a disease that claims the lives of six women in Peru every day.

News had spread throughout nearby villages of a pilot screening project for human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus responsible for most cases of cervical cancer. Midwives were arriving in Comunidad El Salvador to show women how to collect their own vaginal samples. The women in line would be joining more than 100,000 others in getting tested as part of the wider screening program, involving Peru's Ministry of Health, government organizations, patient advocates and other groups including Roche.

While it is well understood that HPV screening is vital to preventing cervical cancer, the lack of access in many remote or low-income parts of the world still leaves many women at a level of risk that should be unacceptable in the modern age.

[Link to [Politico article](#)]

Pandemic Agreement Talks “Difficult” Amidst Polarisation, Pressure for an ‘Accord-Lite’ by May 2024 sans Contentious Provisions

Divergences on key issues continued to make it difficult to bridge the gap in positions among countries at WHO this week at the resumed session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body set up to establish a new Pandemic Agreement. Countries consulted among each other on some of these issues this week including on sustainable production, tech transfer, pathogen access and the sharing of benefits, and financing to ensure implementation of potential new obligations, among many other areas.

With effectively five months to spare, and an enormous gulf to close, increasingly many delegates privately questioned the possibility of concluding negotiations by May 2024 unless countries agree towards a narrow aspirations-based accord that more or less keeps the status quo.

[Link to [Geneva Health Files article](#)]

Conflicts and humanitarian crises heighten cyber threats for International Geneva’s NGOs

International Geneva’s humanitarian and human rights organisations are too easy prey for hackers, with the intensifying conflict landscape and unfolding crises putting them at even greater risk, warns CyberPeace Institute chief executive Stéphane Duguin.

Urban legend has it that thieves maintain codes of honour – like Robin Hood only stealing from the rich. But the spike in the number of cyber attacks on healthcare facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic proved that there are no ethical lines that some hackers are not prepared to cross.

There are no exceptions either for Geneva’s 432 NGOs, which are no more immune to being attacked than any commercial company, says CyberPeace Institute chief executive Stéphane Duguin. Their critical role in providing support in conflict and fragile settings is precisely what can make them more vulnerable to attacks, he warns.

The institute’s latest report published last Friday reveals that 41 per cent of the Geneva-based organisations surveyed have been hacked in the last three years, while 70 per cent admitted that if an attack were to happen, they would not be resilient enough to recover.

[Link to [Geneva Solutions article](#)]

Health tool to help integrate the vertical with the horizontal

With today being Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, many stakeholders are rightly concerned about the stalling progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG3) "Good Health and Well-being," of which UHC is an integral part. Since many SDG indicators of progress are outcome-focused, they cannot tell us why progress is stalling and therefore what needs to be done. To advance toward SDG3, policymakers need to shed light on why progress is stalling. For that, we need different data and we argue that health facility surveys can help move the policy community forward in the right direction.

[Link to [Center for Global Development article](#)]

Other Articles

Legal Challenges to Uganda's Anti-LGBTQ Act Are Consolidated as Violence Continues to Rise

As violence against LGBTQ people in Uganda continues to rise following the country's adoption of its harsh Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), four legal challenges to the law have been consolidated into a single case.

However, Uganda's Attorney General has ignored human rights groups' application for an injunction against the implementation of the law until the appeals have been heard, LGBTQ activist Pepe Onziema told Health Policy Watch.

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

Court challenges to Uganda's anti-LGBTQ act are consolidated as violence continues to rise

As violence against LGBTQ people in Uganda continues to rise following the country's adoption of its harsh Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), four legal challenges to the law have been consolidated into a single case. However, Uganda's Attorney General has ignored human rights groups' application for an injunction against the implementation of the law until the appeals have been heard, LGBTQ activist Pepe Onziema told Health Policy Watch. After a series of meetings between the four groups petitioning against the law and Ugandan Constitutional Court Judge Geoffrey Kiryabwire last week, the petitioners agreed to combine their cases.

[Link to [Health Policy Watch article](#)]

Activists in Uganda finalise appeal against draconian anti-gay law

Civil society groups in Uganda will meet constitutional court judges this week as they attempt to overturn the world's harshest anti-LGBTQ+ law. The law, which received overwhelming support from MPs when it was passed in March, imposes the death sentence and life imprisonment for certain homosexual acts. Activists will appear at the court on Monday to finalise their appeal before the date is set for a full hearing later this month. Clare Byarugaba, an LGBTQ+ advocate from Chapter Four, a Ugandan civil liberties organisation, said: "We are challenging the anti-homosexuality law because it does not pass any constitutional litmus test, and we shall win, because such an abhorrent law whose only aim is to spread hate and institutionalise discrimination and exclusion does not belong on Uganda's law books and should never have been enacted in the first place."

[Link to [The Guardian article](#)]

